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——— you esteem yourself very fortunate, by the great exertions of an excellent crew, to get under shelter of some island to pass the night; your male friends on shore, all laughing in their sleeve, and your female, trembling in their's; being obliged to worry out the night on a chair without sleeping, and without a book to read, while a half dozen of your companions are snoring in the small cabin around you in such tones, that they would be sent to the rear of an army which was meditating a surprise, if the enemy lay within three miles; next morning to be landed before sun-rise, cold, cramped, sleepy, full of sea qualms, and when hastening home *incog.* at an hour when none but day-labourers should be stirring, to meet a person, who, from his weather-wise sagacity, had perfidiously pretended some inevitable, sudden engagement the day before, not to be of the party, out of whose way you meant to have kept for a week at least, and who inquires with an insidious grin, "What kind of a time have you had?"



The Abuses of Political Discussion.

Look at the examination of political questions in our own land, (for we need not go one step further,) and you would hardly suppose, that writers for the publick, had any settled feeling of their responsibility, or stopped to ask themselves, what influence they were exerting, or what might be its consequences. I am not speaking now of the careful knave, who has his eye upon preferment, and abuses the judgment and confidence of those who are to help him on. He measures his power very well, and looks distinctly to its effect. There are mischiefs and abuses in the discussions of men, who are honest and intelligent enough for the best cause; of men who are too ignorant for the wholesome support of any; and of others, who hope to make up in selfish prudence and acquiescence, what they lack in strength, decision, and independence. We have the resolute partizan, bound hand and foot to his old friends, and a few old favourite measures—monopolizing truth, and yet shaming her spirit. We have the ignorant and vain, blustering in the

newspapers and public meetings, burning for notoriety ; and what is worse, finding readers and listeners as proud and prodigal as themselves, of the abused privilege of saying every where, whatever one thinks.

If we go to a higher class of teachers, we shall meet the rash and decided politician, who would as soon part with his integrity, as keep back or mitigate a single article of his stubborn system. He is separated, perhaps, by a few peculiarities of sentiment, from the calmest and most deliberate men about him—men too, with whom he mainly agrees and commonly acts ; but he will not stop to advise with them ; he plunges into the multitude with his novelties or eccentricities ; a most conscientious oracle truly, who would set the people in an uproar, when there is no safety but in calm cooperation, merely that he may send out his own opinion, or perhaps establish his speculative singularities. He will take little pains to acquaint himself with public feeling, or to humour men's infirmities. He is too honest for that. It is enough for him that he is right ; and if others cannot relish the coarse or ill-timed truth, they must look to it themselves. In times of dismay and confusion, when sacrifices, not of truth but of pride, are to be made ; when honest conciliation should mingle with uprightness, he will, with the best purposes in the world, harass and thwart the united efforts of men no less sincere and intelligent than himself.

But rash and stern teachers are not the only ones who are censurable. There are men of a timid, selfish cast, who go for honest men, and would make you think they are only prudent and busy for the Commonwealth. And it is sad, that the most successful school for prudence here, is that of popularity ; of getting and keeping office. Such teachers are rarely out of fashion with the times. Their patriotism is exceedingly flexible, and almost as easy as their unwearied smile. They lead a life of apologies, and retractions, and new resolutions, so that the ignorant might take them to be as rash and erring as the lightning, though fair, honest, and repentant withal ; while those, who see things better, believe that they are not loth to seem in error, for the sake of putting on the charm of penitence and of respectful deference to the wisdom of the people.

Such teachers as these adopt popular and accommodating rules of political judgment and action. To day you will hear of *measures not men*, with an understanding, however, that the rule may be turned about with the changes of to-morrow. Again, we must fall in with the majority, either because it never errs, or because it is the safer side, or because you may rescue something from popular violence, by appearing to humour it. They have no indignation at guilt, unless it be unpopular; no eloquence in urging duties which men are backward to perform. They love to see their fellow-citizens good humoured, satisfied with themselves; and to be, in some humble measure, the source of their happiness. Such guides are the very last to inspire honourable confidence, or give stability to publick opinion. They may keep things tranquil and gay about us, at least for a time, but they will add nothing settled or awful to the character of a nation, and nothing permanent to its welfare.

The main thing is, for every political teacher to know his responsibility. A great man will, without vanity, feel somewhat in awe of his own influence; especially when he sees that men are readier to adopt error than detect it: that in the heat of political strife, they are eager after sympathy, and willing to fall in with the suggestions of any one, who seems interested and zealous for them, and who lends his reputation and powers to their support and direction. It is the duty, then, of those who think they owe their opinions to the publick, to understand publick sentiment and direct it wisely; not only to be satisfied as to the honesty of their motives, but to look well to the probable effect of what they are publishing. They must use their influence prudently, for none can be stronger, more beneficial, nor more fatal.

Some, indeed, hold, that in a free country, there should be a full expression of opinion, no matter how much it may differ from common or ancient notions and prejudices. We are told, that there are remedies enough for all error, in general intelligence, and in the habits of inquiry and controversy, in which all have been brought up. The danger then of doing harm by publishing the wildest, the most portentous errors, is really so slight, that it ought not to be once thought of, when the advantages of unrestrained

communication are considered : such as a spirit of honest scrutiny, independence of character and self-respect, a sense of one's own importance in society, the chance of getting at all political truth, and thus making the state sounder and happier.

There is certainly something in this, and perhaps a good deal of extravagance. It goes too much on the supposition of human perfection, of the fairness and considerateness of men. It supposes that they have leisure, inclination, and ability to examine political questions thoroughly ; to sit down and make a business of growing wiser. This will hardly do, at least with respect to the generality of men. They should be jealous and enlightened, for they have much to do for the state ; but they cannot be schoolmen, for their condition requires them to be in action. Their school is out-of-doors, under the hot sun, in the very stir of the world. They cannot retire to sheltered porticos, to argue about the rights of man ; the blessed level of society ; the uses of fresh experiment or whimsical theory ; all which have at times made fools or knaves of the wisest, and surely can have no better luck with the unlearned.

It should be remembered too, that where government, as in a free state, is to be affected so nearly by the great body of the people, they must have some settled principles, some common feelings and opinions, which shall bring them to act in concert, and depend on each other. And these are not generally the result of any great reflection or inquiry ; but may often be referred to safe attachments and prejudices which we cannot easily explain, or have had no time to look into. But for all this, we should hardly think men indebted to the teacher, who should, in his rage for improvement and free discussion, break up their earliest principles of action, undertake to scour off the rust of their old sluggish faith, and to make them ashamed of owing their safety to what he calls their ignorance. Such a teacher has to learn, that there is a half-gotten wisdom, which is much worse than none, making deplorable havock among men, whose minds were sober and clear, till they were perplexed by truths they could not fathom, or were tempted to form to themselves glorious and fatal illusions, out of other truths which they had perverted. The surest way

is to fix attention upon principles that are obvious, practical, and essential; such as a plain man wants to keep him safe and consistent in the discharge of his civil duties; such as may be recalled without effort, and applied with almost instinctive promptness. When he sees intelligent men earnest in holding out and illustrating such truths and principles, he will feel some confidence in their powers and sagacity; he will be sure of their honesty, because they address him in a way he can understand, and one that lays every passion asleep, which can clog or darken his judgment. He will be shy of teachers who presume to perplex him, or counteract the effect of sober instruction, by throwing out their opinions at random.

But political discussion should be calm as well as practical. Our institutions and privileges are too costly, to be the prey or theme, of stormy and troubled eloquence, such as kindled the old republicks to madness, and led them to deal with the state and its glory as playthings for their passions. It is not now considered as an insult to the free, to tell them that they must respect deliberation, order, and settled habits; and be content to keep their sympathies and ambition at home, under the control of good sense and sound morals. Still there are dangers of false excitement and corrupt eloquence even now. Men have not yet got over their love of being moved, of coming to their duties with feverish preparation, rather than with calm and brave resolution. And if you want bad men to succeed, the best thing you can do for them is to form and cherish in the people a habit of excitement, of approaching their interests with heated minds, of looking upon truth as cold and spiritless, unless it is fairly on fire, or relieved and garnished by eloquence. Once get up this taste, in support of the honestest principles, and by and by you will find other teachers in your places, turning your weapons to most admirable uses, and lighting the torch of hell at your pure vestal flame of truth.

I would not be misunderstood, nor considered as cold to the passion of eloquence, when it pours fresh and in torrents from a warm and full heart. I know that imagination was not given us in vain, to be derided by the half-starved, calculating, frozen thinkers, who are too economical of intellect to spare

one needless thought ; too strait and puritanical in their rhetorick to admit illustration, if it come in ornament and magnificence. Let truth have all its natural lights and helps. The teacher of religion or politicks should bring to his aid all the force and riches of his genius. And if his heart is in the act, he will not fail to express his zeal, to pour life and glow into his thoughts, and stir up in others, the deep and solemn interest that is working in his own heart. But there is nothing unnatural or forced in this ; no attempt to produce excitement beyond the importance of the subject, or out of the subject ; to make men feel violently, because they love the luxuries of strong passion, or because it delights the vanity, or advances the selfish purposes of the teacher, to hold the hearts of others in his hand, and play on them as pleases him. The interest that is excited grows up naturally ; the attention is fixed and sharpened ; a manly, discriminating taste is formed, and our moral perception is quickened.

Another thing which deserves consideration, is the practice among our every-day political writers, of dwelling mainly, if not exclusively on popular topicks ; and rarely, or never entering on any discussion, independently of passing events and present excitement. The temptation is, indeed, strong to take men at the very moment they are formed to your hand. The writer is most willing to go through his drudgery, when the world is as eager to listen as he can be to impart. He longs to be felt and admired to-day. He tells you, that it is not for him to start inquiry and interest, and lead men coldly along to conviction, when the state is quiet, and has no thought nor care for any thing but thrift. He is to throw himself into the crowd, and wait till the pressure of events has touched and moved them, and opened their minds to deep and immediate impressions. He will find listeners enough, when he talks to men about their own thoughts and alarms. He will lay his hand on the heart with power, when it is warm and tender. His instructions will go nearer home, when supported by present experience, and the uses of experience will be wider and surer, if explained and enforced, when the remembrance of what we have past through is yet unworn.

There are sprightly declaimers, who entertain themselves with this pretty talk about popular excitement. They seem to be as ignorant as children of the dangers to which it exposes the teacher as well as the multitude; that his mind, his calm judgment may be swept away by the tempest about him; or that it may become so buried in the present, as never to stretch into other times; never to regard evils and dangers as if they had causes, bearings, or connexions; as if they might return, or be followed by worse than themselves. The fact is, we have talked about the wholesome agitations of society, till we are come to look upon peace as a state of intellectual sluggishness; to think that men will not consent to listen till they have begun to burn; that the mind gets its healthiest spring from popular turbulence, and will acquire best when it is most troubled. Think, for a moment, what hopeful progress will be made by men, who are hurried, raw and unprepared, from their regular industry, into the school of faction or revolution, to study their duties and rights, and lay up the lessons of experience. We see events crowding upon each other in a sweeping and wasteful tide. The crimes and wonders of yesterday are lost in the vaster ones of to-day. The wave that now rolls on the shore, is washing away even the desolations of the retreating one. And yet, in all this hurry and alteration, you would set men to studying facts; you would initiate them in their duties, and form in them habits of calm reflection! Much of this might indeed be effected, if political excitement were only a strong, generous desire, in the whole state, to bring about some definite good. But we know it to be contentious, blind, selfish, and bitter, laying men naked to all sorts of influences. And the wicked may thrive then; for every office is held out to every man, and what should be deserved only, may be stolen or bought. They may make profit of treachery. They will work craftily upon the same passions which you are trying to feed with virtue. And the poison will travel as far as the blood, and through the same vessels too.

No doubt, it is all right to make a fair use of opportunity, of general attention and warmth. But the writer, who waits till excitement comes, wastes the best hours which the people have for learning and preparation, and en-

courages them in shameful indifference to the state, when its course is tranquil. This indifference is one of the plainest of all publick mischiefs. Even in a despotism it is an evil; for even there the power of opinion is felt and respected. Let the sovereign say, if he chooses, that his authority is his own; that he owes no account of its exercise to any constituent. Let him plan and resolve by himself, and feel the web of his policy shaking and going to pieces, if the people but approach him. For all this, he is looking about for ever to know what is thought of him, and how far he may presume upon the forbearance, or build upon the affections of his subjects. In the government men live under, and in its administration, we may always read their character and influence; and how important is this truth in a free state, where publick opinion is every thing, and its full and just expression, at the very foundation of freedom and security; where honest discussion saves the ruler from error and presumption, and the people from trusting him too far.

I shall hear, perhaps, that this supposed indifference to the state is all a dream of my own; that men are always fond enough of meddling with government; of touching it, however faintly, by an opinion or a vote. But take them in ordinary times; the best and soberest men in the community, and you will see how willing they are to forget past oppressions and insults, and to leave the country and the ruler to themselves; how slowly they are startled by the early encroachments of power; how content they are to give up elections to those, who have more leisure for the state, or more eagerness for their own preferment. There are dangers of indifference then, as well as of passion. And the guides of society can do no better nor more honourable service, than making men intelligent and watchful when there is no fever in the blood. If the people will presume to take upon themselves the vast and solemn charge of their own government, they should know that they have work upon their hands. They should be constrained to think, when there is time for it, for they have much to learn. Their only excitement must be a deep concern for their own welfare. Their zeal must be given only to their duties; and they must take good care, that

they do not justify by their indifference, the rough reproach, which some one has cast upon their ignorance; that the bulk of mankind have nothing to do with laws, but obey them.

The safety of a free people is in the principles, taste, and calm habits of thinking, which they acquire when the mind is sober, and looks widely and fairly. They can then learn the worth of their actual blessings, and will grow more and more fond of what is settled and venerable, by associating it with their long happiness. They will thus be less subject to sudden changes of sentiment or condition. There will be something like natural growth in their alterations and improvements. And if called into unexpected shocks or trials, they will not be shaken out of their old feelings and principles, but will apply them as guides and restraints. And when the calm and level have come again, they will not sink into lethargy for want of excitement, but will return to their former state, with new wisdom and stronger attachments than ever. In such a nation, you will see every thing brisk, healthy, and conscious. A man moves there with an assurance of his dignity, with no sluggishness nor wantonness in his freedom, and looking upon his duties as upon his happiness.

ORIGINAL POETRY.

FOR THE NORTH-AMERICAN JOURNAL.

The following song has come into my hands, as a translation by a celebrated English bard, from the German of Goethe. I vouch for nothing, except that it has never been published, and place it at your disposal.

SONG.

“*Italiam quero patriam.*”

Know'st thou the land ? where stately Laurels bloom,
Where Orange groves exhale their rich perfume,
Soft breezes float along the lucid sky,